DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 386 968 HE 028 549

AUTHOR Clagett, Craig A.; Kerr, Helen S.
TITLE Institutional Research: What Should We Expect? Defining and Exceeding Campus Expectations. AIR 1995 Annual Forum Paper.
PUB DATE May 95
NOTE 29p.; Paper presented at the Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research (35th, Boston, MA, May 28-31, 1995).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Accountability; Decision Making; Evaluation Criteria; Higher Education; *Institutional Research; *Job Performance; Management Systems; *Organizational Effectiveness; Policy Formation; Research Administration; *Researchers; *Research Opportunities; *Staff Role
IDENTIFIERS *AIR Forum

ABSTRACT

Expectations and roles of institutional researchers in higher education institutions are considered, as well as the question of what a research office should expect from its institution. A performance monitoring system for the assessment and continuous improvement of institutional research is also proposed. Ways that institutional research can be effective and have impact on policy formation and decisionmaking at the highest levels of the institution are identified. Sponsors and consumers of institutional research should be able to expect the following from its practitioners: technical competence, professional integrity and ethics, contributing to policy relevance, effective communication, high productivity, initiative, making a positive impact, self-evaluation and ongoing improvement, humility, and a sense of humor. In order to deliver on the expectations of its users the institutional research should expect the following from its institution: regular interaction with policymakers; access to campus databases; appropriate technology, including access to the Internet; adequate staff; professional development opportunities; and recognition by senior management. To promote efficient and effective office performance, a system is needed which incorporates explicit goals, assessment tools, a project management system, publications to disseminate office findings, and staff recognition and incentives. Each of these system components is described. (Contains 14 references.) (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 386 968

Institutional Research: What Should We Expect?

Defining and Exceeding Campus Expectations

Craig A. Clagett
Director of Institutional Research and Analysis
Prince George's Community College
310 Largo Road K-231
Largo, Maryland 20772
301-322-0723

Helen S. Kerr
Director of Research and Analysis
Maryland Independent College and University Association
60 West Street, Suite 201
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-269-0306

Paper presented at the Thirty-fifth Annual Forum of the
Association for Institutional Research
May 28-31, 1995
Boston, Massachusetts

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
AIR
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

HE028549

AIR
for Management Research, Policy Analysis, and Planning

This paper was presented at the Thirty-Fifth Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at the Boston Sheraton Hotel & Towers, Boston, Massacusetts, May 28-31, 1995. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of Forum Papers.

Jean Endo
Editor
AIR Forum Publications

Institutional Research: What Should We Expect?

Defining and Exceeding Campus Expectations

Institutional research has the potential to be a major contributor to collegewide policy formation. Yet many institutions, and many practitioners, expect less from institutional research. Low expectations lead to inadequate institutional support, which contributes to suboptimal performance, which reinforces low expectations. Appropriate expectations are identified from the perspectives of both consumers and providers of institutional research. The question of what a research office should expect from its institution is addressed. The paper concludes with presentation of a performance monitoring system for the assessment and continuous improvement of institutional research. The paper is deliberately provocative to elicit discussion and self-examination.

Institutional Research: What Should We Expect?

Accountability continues to pervade the higher education agenda. Assessment of student learning outcomes, faculty productivity, facilities usage, resource allocation and cost containment strategies--these and other evaluation processes are now commonplace. At most colleges, institutional research is heavily involved in these accountability and assessment activities. With access to and understanding of institutional databases, sophisticated analytical capabilities, report-writing skills, and reputations for objectivity and credibility, research offices are typically well situated to contribute to campus accountability efforts. But institutional research itself should not be immune to such scrutiny; the research function must be accountable as well. Such assessment requires standards and measures for assessing the effectiveness of institutional research. These standards and measures should reflect the expectations placed on institutional research.

What should others expect of institutional research? What should we expect of ourselves? What should we expect of our institutions? This paper addresses these *What should we expect?* questions based on experiences from two different viewpoints. First, from the perspective of a research director at a statewide association of independent colleges, a *consumer* of institutional research for influencing public policy in the state capital. Second, from the perspective of a director of a college research office, a *provider* of institutional research for both internal and external audiences. The authors draw on over 20 years of personal

experience studying and attempting to improve the practice of institutional research. The paper also benefitted from a lively dialogue on these issues conducted during January and February 1995 over the MdAIR-list, the electronic discussion list of the Maryland Association for Institutional Research. The contributions of our Maryland colleagues--especially Ron Maggiore, Dan McConochie, Javier Miyares, and Merrill Pritchett--are gratefully acknowledged.

The Effective Institutional Research Office Defined

Effective research offices are integrated into decisionmaking at the highest levels of their institutions. Behaviors that are indicative of effective institutional researchers include (1) being a member of, or regular participant in meetings of, the president's staff or college planning council, (2) making significant contributions to collegewide budgeting and resource allocation decisions, (3) publishing information that raise issues onto the agenda of top policymakers, (4) completing analyses that influence major institutional policy decisions, and (5) periodically making presentations to the institution's governing board (although this is more likely at a community college or liberal arts college than at a large university). In a phrase, the effectiveness of institutional research is measured by its *impact on policy*.

This policy-influencing role is not new, but it is becoming a primary function of institutional research as technological and managerial trends displace the data-providing role of the past. Distributed processing and decentralized decisionmaking suggest that many in the organization may need and have access to data. In such environments, institutional research may take on decision support system design, data

administration, and end-user training functions. But we argue that the research professional, combining a penchant for the details involved in data analysis with a broad campuswide perspective, can be an invaluable member of the top policymaking group. If the right information can improve policy choices, the institutional researcher is potentially the best person to provide it.

To fulfill this policy-influencing role, the institutional research professional needs to be considered a part of the top policymaking team and should exhibit the behaviors enumerated above. At many institutions, this would mean raising existing expectations about the contribution institutional research should be making. Concomitant with these higher expectations, however, may be the need for increased institutional support in staffing and other resources. We suspect that much of the suboptimal performance we see reflects the inadequate support associated with low expectations.

Breaking out of this low expectations-inadequate support-suboptimal performance cycle may take changes in attitudes by both the consumers and providers of institutional research. The next two sections provide discussions of the expectations we feel are reasonable from both points of view; that is, what consumers should expect from institutional research, and what institutional research should expect from its institution.

Institutional Research: What Should Its Consumers Expect?

Sponsors and consumers of institutional research should be able to expect the following from its practitioners:

Technical competence. Researchers are presumed to know what they're doing in terms of research design, database structures, data analysis, computer applications, and similar number-crunching skills. Such technical competencies should be prerequisite to securing a position in institutional research.

Professional integrity and ethics. Commitment to, and practice of, proper professional behavior as embodied in the AIR *Code of Ethics* for institutional research is assumed. The temptations for transgressions are plentiful, given the discretionary nature of decisions regarding research design and methodology, and the political pressures to produce findings supportive of those in power. Darrell Huff, in *How to Lie with Statistics* (1954, p. 120), made the first point this way:

> The fact is that, despite its mathematical base, statistics is as much an art as it is a science. A great many manipulations and even distortions are possible within the bounds of propriety. Often the statistician must choose among methods, a subjective process, and find the one that he will use to represent the facts. In commercial practice he is about as unlikely to select an unfavorable method as a copywriter is to call his sponsor's product flimsy and cheap when he might as well say light and economical.

A common data adage in the profession is that "if you torture data long enough it will confess to anything." Institutional research must resist becoming a legitimation function for preordained decisions.

Policy relevance. In our view, the key value of effective institutional research is its contribution to informed policymaking. This requires that the researcher possess both issues intelligence and contextual intelligence (Terenzini, 1991). Awareness of the

institution and the environment in which it operates is necessary to maximize the policy impact of institutional research. According to Ewell (1989, p. 2):

> the successful application of knowledge requires the simultaneous presence of two conditions. First, the information must have a visible bearing on a perceived problem. Second, there must be a constant and consistent dialogue between those who gather and provide information and those who must use it.

This dialogue is needed for several reasons. Regular interaction with top management ensures that the researcher knows what top policymakers want--and need. If the researcher knows the context and focus of the impending policy decision, he or she may be able to provide useful information beyond that which policymakers have requested. Policymakers do not want to be overwhelmed with data, but rather benefit most from information that is targeted. ("Data, data, everywhere but not a thought to think" is the situation to be avoided. Put another way: Data without a mission may as well be missing. Or: Data without context is misinformation.) The dialogue is further enhanced and facilitated if the research professional understands the history and culture of his or her institution. Knowledge of individual personalities and campus politics should shape research agenda and dissemination decisions, ensuring the "organizational validity" that promotes acceptance of research findings (Heacock, 1993).

In addition to knowing your campus and the needs and personalities of its key decisionmakers, researchers benefit from knowledge of trends in the institution's external environment. Regular environmental scanning, including a close eye on the corporate world, can help the researcher anticipate upcoming issues affecting the

campus so that current research design and database decisions position the office for future policy-relevant contributions. Intelligence-gathering is a prime institutional research function, and key to ensuring its policy relevance.

Effective communication. Researchers must present their findings in formats accessible to top policymakers. Transforming data into useful information is both an art and a science. Researchers are expected to possess tabular, graphic, written, and oral communication skills (Clagett and Huntington, 1993).

High productivity. Given the demands typically made on them, research offices must operate at high efficiency in order to free up the time for the context-rich, issue-focused projects we advocate as institutional research's major contribution to its campus. And, in these tight fiscal times of doing more with less, institutions have a right to expect high productivity from each campus office.

Initiative. An efficient research office, attuned to the policy environment facing campus decisionmakers, should be in a position to raise new issues, contribute new, unsolicited insights, and bring new data to bear on hot issues. An example of an effective institutional research initiative at Prince George's Community College is illustrative (Clagett, 1992). The college was under attack by students and local legislators for its high tuition, despite its record of low per-student expenditures and modest budget. The institutional research director, on his own initiative, acquired

expenditure data for Prince George's and four neighboring counties from the state department of fiscal services and developed a comparative analysis of community college funding. The analysis found that, by several different measures, Prince George's had provided about half the level of community college funding support that the other counties provided. Dissemination of the comparative funding analysis succeeded in defusing the high tuition charge, by deflecting most criticism away from the college and to the historically low level of county support. Legislators and students came to understand that differences in student charges reflected differences in county aid. County budget staff acknowledged privately that a planned cut in the county's contribution to the college was averted because of the persuasive case made by the college that the county had consistently underfunded it in the past.

Impact. This is the ultimate measure of success. Institutional research success stories provide new understandings of important issues, lead to changes in campus policies, contribute to improving student success, save money or raise revenue, or otherwise have a major impact on an institution. Mired down in mandated reporting or responding to the latest ad hoc data request, researchers enjoy too few of these successes. But such impact is what institutional research should strive for. Regularly making a positive impact typically depends upon all of the above listed attributes--competence, integrity, relevance, communication skills, high productivity, initiative--plus savvy and often a dose of luck. Knowing the organizational and personal objectives of key decisionmakers is crucial, but sometimes serendipity plays a role.

Self-evaluation and continuous improvement. Research, like all other campus functions, should be expected to routinely monitor its performance and strive for improvement. This can be done through adoption of Total Quality Management techniques (Heverly, 1993; McLaughlin and Snyder, 1993) or less formal practices, such as those described in the final section of this paper. Zeglen (1994, p.2) has suggested that, by "adopting tactical applications of TQM techniques rather than the more long-term strategic deployment of TQM planning, some gains in productivity and quality may be achieved by offices with less investment of scarce time and staff resources." Two tools mentioned by Zeglen are especially useful in institutional research. First, maintenance of an *error log* listing errors by stage of occurrence and detection (project definition, design, production, presentation, or evaluation), the person discovering the error, insights into why the error occurred, and suggestions for preventing such errors in the future. (In her study, most errors occurred during the production stage. Three-fourths were discovered by research office staff, but nearly half were discovered after the project results had left the office.) One tool for helping minimize errors is a *quality action questions (QAQ) checklist* (Zeglen, p. 12) that prompts evaluation at each stage of a project.

Humility. At the 29th annual forum of the Association for Institutional Research in Baltimore, James Dator suggested that institutional researchers occupy a "very precious space between spineless administrators and mindless academicians." Talented researchers can develop a professional arrogance after years on the job, but

are well advised to keep in mind the limitations of the information services they provide. Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted, counts. The following disclaimer has made its way around the Internet:

> We fully realize that we have not succeeded in answering all of your questions. Indeed, we feel that we have not answered any of them completely. The answers we have found only serve to raise a whole new set of questions, which only lead to more problems, some of which we weren't even aware were problems. To sum it all up, in some ways we feel we are as confused as ever, but we believe we are confused on a higher level, and about more important things.

A sense of humor. Institutional research can be very stressful, especially if it is involved in the top policy issues we argue it should be. But we all must keep a proper perspective on life, and sharing or raising a smile is always important.

What Should Institutional Research Expect from Its Institution?

In order to deliver on the expectations of its users, institutional research should expect the following from its institution:

Regular interaction with policymakers. As noted above, to ensure that the work institutional research does will be useful to policymakers requires ongoing dialogue with them. Establishing personal rapport with people at the top increases the likelihood that research will influence policy. As one respondent to the electronic discussion list put it, "a one-person office with no budget but having access and trust from the president can have more impact than a well-funded office four layers down." There is evidence to suggest that many researchers are frustrated by the lack of this

kind of access. A survey of all community college research officers in the South found insufficient access to top level administrators and a lack of appreciation by direct line supervisors of the potential contributions of institutional research to be major complaints (Rowh, 1992). Similarly, a national survey of AIR members found presidents who weren't data people, lack of access to top decisionmakers, and perceptions that research wasn't part of the campus leadership team prevalent complaints (Huntington and Clagett, 1991). Sample comments from the latter survey:

> *The biggest obstacle to our effectiveness is the lack of communication from senior administrators regarding current and upcoming policy issues.*
>
> *Reporting line is not close enough to top level decisionmakers.*
>
> *Key leaders do not understand IR and the function it should perform. We constantly have to coach and explain information to several key leaders.*
>
> *The biggest problem is not having people at the top who really want the data and information institutional research can provide.*
>
> *None of our top level administrators are data people. The college does not take advantage of the resources of the IR office anywhere near the degree it could because upper level administrators don't realize the potential of the office and have trouble relating to data.*

In addition to ensuring the relevance, dissemination and use of research, regular dialogue provides opportunities to participate in policy exploration and development, eliciting the passion that creative research professionals revel in and encouraging innovation and initiative in the research office.

Access to campus databases. Research offices must have direct access to campus electronic databases. Many institutions are moving to decentralized processing, and

encouraging offices campuswide to access and analyze data on their own. At such places, the role of institutional research is changing from being the primary provider of information to one of data administration, system design, and interpretation (Matross, 1988). Whatever the office's role, ready access to--and understanding of--all major college databases is essential.

Appropriate technology, including access to the Internet. Every member of the research team needs computer hardware with adequate capabilities to handle the files and run the software appropriate to their tasks. In addition, an Internet account is becoming increasingly indispensable for communicating with colleagues, participating in professional organizations, and accessing information.

Adequate staff. Observation, conversations with colleagues, and survey research all suggest that many offices are understaffed, precluding them from reaching the full potential of institutional research. Even if dedicated and hardworking, a one- or two-person office probably cannot fulfill the role we are describing. Findings from a national survey of institutional research directors support this assertion. Asked what was the biggest obstacle to increasing the effectiveness of their office in influencing policy, respondents most frequently cited insufficient staff (Huntington and Clagett, 1993).

An institutional research office, irrespective of the size of its institution, needs at least two research professionals *in addition to* the director if it is to *regularly*

contribute to collegewide policymaking. This support frees up the director's time for the intelligence gathering, committee service, informal networking, and dissemination functions that are essential if research is to have maximal impact. The demands of state and federal reporting, external surveys, and routine, recurring institutional data reporting can easily consume the time of one full-time analyst. The second analyst is needed for the in-depth, policy-focused studies that constitute the core contribution of the best institutional research.

Professional development opportunities. To keep up with new technologies, educational policy trends, changes in the environment affecting higher education, and the latest in research methodologies, institutional researchers need access to professional journals, workshops, and conferences. As the chief information officer in the top policy circle, the institutional researcher must have exposure to these kinds of resources, even when campus cost containment efforts are reducing periodical and travel budgets. Having the researcher serve this intelligence-gathering function for the campus can be a cost-effective investment.

Recognition by senior management. Acknowledgement that institutional research is a primary player in policy formation facilitates its successful achievement of that role. Knowledge that information is being sought and used in decisionmaking, and that the institutional researcher has direct input, promotes both formal and informal communications, enhancing the intelligence-gathering role.

A Performance Monitoring Indicator System for Institutional Research

To promote efficient and effective office performance, a system incorporating explicit goals, assessment tools, and staff recognition is beneficial. In this section, a performance monitoring indicator system developed by the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis (OIRA) at Prince George's Community College (PGCC) is described.

Office Goals

As part of the college's overall planning process, the OIRA prepares goals and objectives for each fiscal year. These reflect current campus strategic priorities as well as on-going functional responsibilities. The performance monitoring indicators described here are different. These emphasize office productivity and include measures applicable to individual staff performance. The nine performance goals measure total office output, campuswide service, timeliness of task completion, dissemination, and quality. Output is measured by the total number of projects completed and the percent of requested projects this represents. Campuswide service is measured by the number of projects completed for each of the college's five divisions. Timeliness is measured by the percent of priority projects completed by their target completion date. Dissemination is measured by the number of reports distributed and the number of formal presentations made. Quality is measured by the number of ERIC publications submitted, scale means on a customer satisfaction survey, and the number of awards made for superior office efforts recognized on- and

off-campus for their impact. These indicators and the systems put in place to generate and track them are explained in detail below. The office's performance goals for fiscal year 1995 were as follows:

Office of Institutional Research and Analysis Performance Goals for 1994-95	
Total projects completed	100
Minimum projects per division	5
Completions/requests ratio	90%
Project completion by target date	100%
Total reports (excluding tech memos)	40
Formal presentations	6
ERIC publications	10
RUSS scale means	>4.00
EMI awards	2

Assessment and Monitoring Tools

The OIRA uses four tools for generating and tracking performance indicators: a project management database system, publication typologies, a mid-year office review, and a customer satisfaction survey.

Project Management System. An indispensable tool for assessing and monitoring the performance of the research office is the Institutional Research Project Management System (IRPMS). This system is maintained on the office's standard database software package--specific project management software is not needed. (See Chambers, 1994, for a discussion of similar project tracking systems at several

campuses.) The data elements included in IRPMS are an assigned project number, name of person requesting the service, request date, a target completion date, project title, project leader, priority (1 to 4), project status, date begun, date completed, and a notepad for brief commentary. At the beginning of the fiscal year, the office prepares an annual research plan incorporating all federal- and state-mandated reports, selected external surveys, recurring institutional data analyses and reports, and priority research projects extracted from the office's annual goals and objectives. All projects in this annual research plan or calendar are loaded into IRPMS July 1. During the course of the year, additional ad-hoc project requests are added to the system as received. Note that IRPMS is a *project* monitoring system, not a log of all data requests received by the office. Simple data extractions and other requests that can met within a day or two are not entered in the system.

The IRPMS is used for monitoring current operations and for biannual, in-depth reviews of office performance. Prior to scheduled staff meetings, each research team member is provided a project leader turnaround sheet listing all assigned projects and providing space for updating their status. These turnarounds are returned to the director who updates the system and then generates a project status summary for all projects with target completion dates during the next 6 weeks. This summary is used during staff meetings to review and plan staff work. IRPMS also produces a summary of project activity for use in preparing the office's monthly report to the vice president. The software permits other quick reports to be extracted from the database as needed. For the in-depth assessments of office accomplishments, a

standard set of performance measures is generated from IRPMS. Trends in these indicators are tracked over time in a set of data displays prominently displayed on the office's central bulletin board. These indicators are used for goal setting, assessing office accomplishments, and evaluating the performance of individual staff members.

Publications. Publications are a primary means of disseminating office findings. But tracking patterns in report generation also provides a good way of assessing office productivity and service to the campus community. To facilitate this, research office publications at PGCC are classified according to two schemes. First, reports are issued according to a fiscal-year and report-type classification scheme (e.g., BT95-2). The publications typology includes nine categories:

> **Reports to the Board.** Reports prepared at the request of the Board of Trustees are issued under the *BT* numbering scheme. The majority are routine annual reports on cost containment, enrollment, facilities, staffing, and student outcomes. The Board occasionally receives reports published in other categories at the direction of the President.
>
> **Planning Briefs.** These are short reports prepared for the Planning Council. Budget analyses, enrollment projections, and environmental scanning reports are typical examples.
>
> **Enrollment Analyses.** Descriptive reports about the college's students constitute the majority of the reports issued in the *EA* series. Course pass rate and student persistence analyses are also included.
>
> **Market Analyses.** Studies to support recruiting and marketing campaigns are included in this category. Examples are an annual market share analysis showing where county residents go to college and studies using the PG-TRAK© lifestyle cluster geo-demographic analysis system.
>
> **Program Evaluations.** Evaluative studies of academic and instructional support programs are issued in this category.

Needs Assessments. Studies to assess the viability of proposed instructional programs are issued in this category.

Research Briefs. Typically short (sometimes 1 or 2 pages) summaries of research findings, this catch-all category occasionally includes larger studies not fitting into any of the above categories.

Factbooks. Data references without narrative interpretation, issued in a series of modules to facilitate updating.

Technical Memoranda/Presentation Chartbooks. This category includes documentation of office methodologies, data compilations without textual analysis, responses to specific ad hoc data inquiries, and other analyses not intended for wide distribution. Chartbooks of slides and transparencies prepared for oral presentations are also included here.

Tracking the number of publications in each of these categories over time reveals trends in campus activity and information use. The Planning Council was especially active in FY90 and FY91, reflected in high numbers of planning briefs. An increase in research briefs in the mid-1990s reflected an OIRA information dissemination strategy. Experience suggested that members of the president's staff would read short research briefs the day they were distributed, while they would tend to set aside a larger, more comprehensive report. The office's comprehensive analysis of fall enrollment, previously released in a single report, is now distributed in a series of one- or two-page briefs known as "the rainbow series" because each brief is printed on a different color paper.

Another way reports are classified is by topic or subject area. For example, budget-related publications might be issued as reports to the Board, planning briefs, and tech memos, depending on the audience and purpose of the report. Examining trends in publications by topic provides an indication of what subjects have demanded

information support at different points in time. Thirteen topic areas are identified in this classification scheme: academic programs, affirmative action/campus climate, budget and finance, developmental education, enrollment forecasts, enrollment profiles, environmental scanning, facilities/space use, factbooks, market research, methods/documentation, staffing/employees, and student outcomes.

Publication topics have tended to reflect trends in Maryland higher education. Over the 1986-93 period, for example, academic program studies declined while financial analyses increased--reflecting the higher education commission's moratorium on new programs and the statewide fiscal crisis, respectively. The publications history also reflects specific institutional priorities as well. For example, developmental education and marketing were campus topics of high importance in fiscal year 1993. Student outcomes studies regained prominence in fiscal year 1994.

IRMA. While use of the project management system in routine staff meetings throughout the year ensures operational monitoring, it is useful to stop for a more ind-depth assessment of office accomplishments periodically. At PGCC, we do this twice a year. At the end of the fiscal year, the office prepares an annual report for incorporation in the college's overall "evidences of achievement" accountability report and to aid in developing goals and objectives for the following year. But we also do an "Institutional Research Mid-year Assessment" affectionately known as Irma.

RUSS. Asking your customers directly how well you have served them can provide

useful feedback. PGCC's research office periodically includes a Research User Satisfaction Survey (RUSS) in its report distribution. This one-page instrument asks research users to rate (on a 1 to 5 scale) the relevance, timeliness, clarity, usefulness, and professionalism of the office's performance, and concludes with an open-ended question asking how the office could improve its service. However, as Zeglen (1994, p. 1) points out, customer satisfaction surveys are not sufficient by themselves:

> For example, a survey which met the general expectations held by the administrator who commissioned it could have methodological limitations in its sampling technique which would be viewed as a flaw in the larger milieu of institutional research professionals. So, customer satisfaction alone is *not* adequate as a monitor of the quality of institutional research work.

Staff Recognition and Incentives

To recognize research office staff accomplishments, and provide light-hearted incentives, PGCC's research office established four in-house award categories. Staff members are recognized for these achievements at a summer retreat, and on the bulletin board in the main office.

Team 90. To qualify for membership in Team 90, research staff must complete a minimum of 90 percent of the projects assigned to them during the year **and** complete at least 90 percent of their priority 1 and 2 projects by their target dates. Team 90 status is conferred at the end of the fiscal year based on project management system summary reports.

ERIC Publication. The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education solicits institutional research publications for national dissemination through its on-line databases, its monthly abstract journal *Resources in Education*, the ERIC Document Reproduction Service, and its own publications such as the *ERIC Digest* series. The PGCC research office supports ERIC by submitting selected publications to the Clearinghouse each year. The decision to submit, made by the office director, is considered an honor for the report author(s). While nationally ERIC rejects half of the materials submitted to it each year, the PGCC research office has to date a 100 percent acceptance rate. Thus the office's decision, rather than ERIC's acceptance, is the locus of the honor. The director bases the decision to submit a report to ERIC on two criteria. First, will other institutions or researchers benefit from reading it? Second, does the report reflect well on the college and on OIRA in particular? To be useful to others outside PGCC, the report must include an adequate description of the context of the research and a clear explication of the methodology used. Thus many research and planning briefs do not qualify for consideration. Similarly, many projects are so county and college specific as to be of limited value to others. Beyond these considerations, however, is an assessment of report quality. The decision to submit to ERIC recognizes particularly thorough and well-written works by OIRA staff.

Century Club. The typical distribution of an OIRA report at PGCC is 25 to 30 copies. The president's staff and other members of the collegewide Planning Council receive

copies of all OIRA publications. Selected administrators, faculty, and staff with specific association with the report's content also receive copies. For cost containment reasons, other copies are printed and distributed by request only. Thus distribution above 25 or 30 copies is a measure of interest, and demand for, an office publication. To give formal recognition to this acknowledgement of a report's usefulness, the office has established *The Century Club*. An OIRA report that has circulation of 100 or more copies qualifies the author(s) for inclusion in the club. A listing of all reports meeting this standard is proudly displayed on the bulletin board in the main office.

EMI Awards. The ultimate measure of the effectiveness of institutional research is its contribution to institutional effectiveness, and the ultimate research team award is an EMI Award for achievements of Extraordinary Merit and Impact. The awards, polished stones on a black wooden base emblazoned "EMI," are crafted by the director and proudly displayed on staff members' desks. EMIs are reserved for the few projects that truly make an impact, as acknowledged by the college president, board members, outside organizations, or peer institutions. Typically, only one EMI is awarded each year, and in some years none is awarded. The director of institutional research determines if an award is deserved based on informal discussions with members of the president's cabinet and feedback from researchers and others external to the college. Projects earning EMIs are commonly the subject of conference presentations and often serve as models for studies at other colleges. While endorsement and

replication by other institutions is important, the crucial factor is the impact on PGCC. Studies that successfully defuse sensitive political issues, resolve campus controversies, and contribute to a better understanding of student performance are typical candidates. Because they are reserved for those special projects that have great impact, their award is usually an obvious choice. Office recognition as an EMI commonly follows multiple, unsolicited testimonials from policymakers who have found the work most useful.

Summary

If information can improve policy choices, the institutional research professional is potentially the best person to provide it. Possessing knowledge of trustworthy information sources, technical data analysis skills, awareness of the external policy environment, and sensitivity to campus culture and personalities, the institutional researcher can be an invaluable member of the senior policymaking staff. At many institutions, this represents a higher expectation than currently held for the research function. We have enumerated the high expectations an institution should hold for institutional research, and the kinds of support institutional research has a right to expect from its institution. An example of a performance monitoring system to promote productivity and effectiveness in institutional research was described. To realize the maximum contribution from an investment in institutional research, both the institution and the practitioner need to define high expectations and commit to their accomplishment.

Bibliography

Association for Institutional Research (1992). Code of ethics.

Chambers, S.L. (1994). Using an information request database to keep track of where all that information is going. Paper presented at the 34th Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research, New Orleans.

Clagett, C.A. (1992). Assessing county support for Maryland community colleges: An institutional research success story. Paper presented at the 19th annual conference of the North East Association for Institutional Research, Washington, D.C.

Clagett, C.A., and Huntington, R.B. (1993). *Making a Significant Difference with Institutional Research*. Silver Spring, Maryland: Maryland Association for Institutional Research.

Ewell, P.T., ed. (1989). *Enhancing Information Use in Decision Making*. New Directions for Institutional Research, No. 64. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Heacock, R.C. (1993). Personal conversation.

Heverly, M.A. (1993). Using total quality to better manage an institutional research office. *AIR Professional File*, No. 46.

Huntington, R.B., and Clagett, C.A. (1991). Increasing institutional research effectiveness and productivity: findings from a national survey. Paper presented at the 18th annual conference of the North East Association for Institutional Research, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Huntington, R.B., and Clagett, C.A. (1993). Effective institutional research: Obstacles and solutions. *Maryland 2000: Journal of the Maryland Association for Institutional Research* 2: 47-54.

Matross, R. (1988). Designing an information center: An analysis of markets and delivery systems. *AIR Professional File*, No. 31.

McLaughlin, G.W., and Snyder, J.K. (1993). Plan-do-check-act and the management of institutional research. *AIR Professional File*, No. 48.

Rowh, M. (1992). The role of the institutional research officer: Perceptions of job satisfaction. *Community College Journal for Research and Planning* 8(1): 18-26.

Terenzini, P.T. (1991). On the nature of institutional research and the knowledge and skill it requires. Paper presented at the 31st Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research, San Francisco.

Zeglen, M. E. (1994). The error of our ways: using TQM tactics to combat institutional research bloopers. Paper presented at the 34th Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research, New Orleans.